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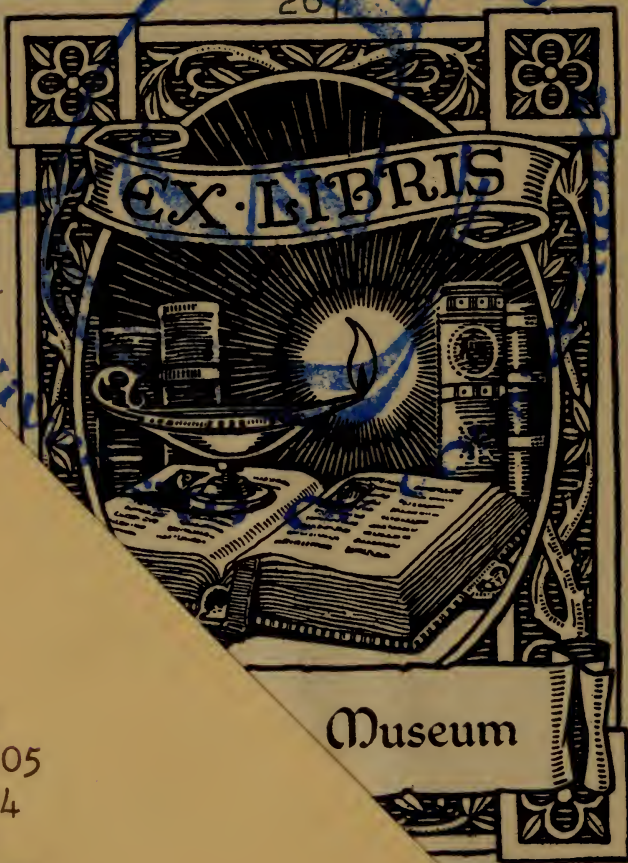
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SHIPS AND LOVERS

By Thomas Caldecot Chubb

SHIPS AND LOVERS

THE LIFE OF GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

KYRDOON

THE WHITE GOD, AND OTHER POEMS

SHIPS and LOVERS

THOMAS CALDECOT CHUBB

*"Poems about ships
and lovers and mag-
nificent pirates"—*

WIFE OF THE CENTAUR

ALBERT AND CHARLES BONI, INC.
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To
CAROLINE
With Love

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I. LOVERS

TWO IN SIGHT OF FLORENCE

THE stranger with the lean and bitter face,
Sharp nose, ironic lips and deep-set eyes,
Leaned toward the other guest, a red-cloaked merchant
With a soft belly and a flabby jowl,
And said to him: "You want not love, but wine;
Not heavenly love, but the crushed Tuscan grape
To wash down a fat pasta, garlic-sauced,
Followed by a mess of birdlets, neatly-roasted
After being smeared with greasy olive oil."
The stranger with the lean and bitter face,
Harsh, biting voice, uncompromising jaw,
Leaned toward the other guest: "Not love, but food,
Fat luxury, soft comfort, a hot bed
Whereon to take your sensuous delight
Bought for so much after the day is done."
But then he paused, and asked: "Or would you march
Across a vale of flint to see her face
And have no more reward than that she smiled
And offered part of the love of God to you?
Would you walk barefoot on ice to have one flower,
Tossed from her distant hand as courtesy?
Would you climb to heaven only to hear her name
Chimed by the angels like a sacred tune,
Or walk because of her, fearless through hell?"
He rose, and his wrists tightened: "I have done this.

I have gone down to the last icy circle
Of my own mind, and painted what I saw.
I have flown higher than ever a song flew
Or a sun-seeking lark at break of day.
I have stood before the pearly throne of God
And touched the snaky scales of the Lord of Ill.
And all because one time I saw a girl
Walk in the sunlight, and but smile at me,—
Once as a boy, once very long ago.
And since that day I have known hate and exile,
Rebuff, self-question, loneliness, hurt pride.
I have been a wanderer on the face of earth.
I have been a beggar at the feet of kings,
And yet have no regret.” Saying which words,
He turned and crossed the inn-room, and he stood
For a moment, like a proud yet fallen angel,
Half prince, yet one half pitiable as he looked
With something far too pitiful for pride
Across the valley toward a gleaming cluster
Of square, brown towers, thick walls, and reddish
domes
Where Dante Alighieri who would be
One day a legend like a prince of God
Might never set his foot, however bitter
An exile’s bread, how steep a stranger’s stairs.

NIGHT SONG

(Suggested by an early Italian madrigal)

TONIGHT, O kind my love, let me come to your bed;
Tonight, O dear my love, let me sleep by your side.
Fling the soft coverlet wide;
Leave but your white breast bare:
Like an angel, then, will you seem to me fair!

And say to me, my dear: "Oh blessed thou art!"
And then move your cool, small hand till it comes to
rest;

After, voice this request:
"Art thou truly my love?"
That I am, I swear by your lips half-parted;
I who clomb from the sward below am your lover;
You my beloved, who watched in the dusk above.

And there, my dear, let me rest till at break of day
The noisy swallows awake us, saying: "It is time!
See the sun climb!"
O false swallows, why must you sing that song?
Let the dear night be only one hour more long!
Do not disturb my slumber, dark and perfumed and
deep!

Sweet it is at the side of my love to sleep!

GHOSTS

FAINT whispers of old perfume
Fill the hush of the little room;

Mignonette faded, that long ago
Stirred chords in her to music so

That even now their memory
Wrings from her heart a voiceless cry.

Outside in the hall the tall clock ticks
As the minutes crawl toward seven from six,

And she sits there, and she sits there
With the last sunlight dusting her hair

To a silver powder that seems to shine,
As she waits the hour when she must dine.

Upstairs, unopened, is a lacquer box
That holds the last of her golden locks,

A small memento of Clotho's shears
That tells the flight of but twenty years.

Twenty years? Ah, their robbery!
Ah, their heartlessness winging by!

She dreams of her vanished loveliness
With a wringing tremor of bitterness.

The thought carries her back again,
And her eyes grow hot at time's refrain.

* * * *

*"Madame, may I the favor get
To dance with you this minuet?"*

*His bow is low and rings he wears
Reflect the glint of the chandeliers.*

*His heels tap the polished floor.
"One dance, Marquis, you may have no more."*

*"Am I so poor and unfavored then,
That you make me discontentest of men?"*

*"The poorness, Marquis, is of my part.
La, I am frail, I must guard my heart."*

* * * *

Under the window verbena twines,
And there the bees drink their scented wines.

But now the bees are winging home
As the cool hours of evening come,

And the west gathers a splendid blaze
To end one more of her hollow days.

She goes to the spinet and touches a note,
And a sweet music starts from her throat,

A wistful, stately, tender tune,
Twenty years old, that they played that June.

* * * *

*"Madame, Lady Terpsichore
Would dance less well and less gracefully."*

*"Marquis, following your elegance,
How than gracefully could I dance?"*

*The music ends and the dancers cease.
The Marquis leads her to her place.*

*The tall Marquis leaves her there,
But he bends his lips to her deep massed hair.*

*And he speaks softly a few words,
Her hands seek him like fluttered birds.*

*"Hearken—don't start—meet with me
On the East terrace presently,*

*"Where I have words," he presses her hand,
"God grant you will understand."*

* * * *

Slowly the birds turn home their flight;
The garden grows soft in a grayer light.

But she sits there with her memories,
And she hardly knows that one more day dies.

* * * *

*Overhead is the naked sky,
Whereon planets go marching by,*

*As if the gods had conceded them
The gesture of a diadem.*

*He speaks, and under the arching pall
His words seem futile, they are so small.*

*"Tonight, Anne, is your beauty sold
To William Clingoe, for so much gold.*

*"He sits in your father's room tonight
With his fat worn purse, and the deed they write.*

*"Then let us part—if you acquiesce
To live this life of loathsomeness.*

*"But Oh, I love you! Oh, with me fly.
I swear by this hand he shall die."*

*In the half dusk behind the hill
She seems to see strife and the wrong man kill.*

*So she cries: "Though you shall win me aid,
Would God forgive the work of your blade?"*

*The Marquis laughs to the stars above.
"What is God to me if I have your love?"*

*They kiss, kiss and the timeless night
Silvers them with its frost of light.*

* * * *

Still that odor she can't forget,
That gray garden of mignonette.

The dream passes like run-out sands,
And her eyes burn, and she lifts her hands.

And she cries out: "Oh the mockery
To have had all this, and have seen it die."

Then she sits to wait for the bawdy din
When the Marquis, her husband, comes reeling in.

CARTOON FOR A FÊTE GALANTE

FIRST the lady with porcelain color as smooth as velours
Whose powdered hair makes her resemble the Pompa-
dour,

Jauntily with splashing, confident strokes paint in:
Show the poor, hectic pride that flushes her skin.

Next, her lover, small though pompous, in brocaded
vest,

A spindle-legged barncock, strutting, narrow of chest,
With oval pale face, and emphatic gallantries.

After that, outline wide, blue-shadowed trees;
Outline marble statues of cupids, paint in cool,
Close-cropped dark-green sward that slopes to a pool;
And far off, for a touch of color, silk-clad and gay,
Two shepherds and a shepherdess out of Arcadia.

And that is all, unless you should see, by some chance,
Fit to include with an artist's calm arrogance,
One bent, tired peasant, herding lean swine up a hill,
His face creased with sharp hunger that would eat
those swine's swill.

WHAT DOES THE LITTLE
JOSEPHINE?

WHAT does the little Josephine
Seek
In dream
On the green
Island of Martinique?
What does she look for?
What fancies gleam?
Blown by warm breeze
Over warm seas
Where the rich oranges,
Ripe and fragrant,
Hang from the trees,
Like to the heavy golden apples
Of the Hesperides?

What thoughts the little Josephine,
Puzzle, amaze,
In those hot creole days,
Under the palms?
Oncoming charms?
Distant alarms?
Years she can blame or praise?

Does she see France
With its web of mischance?
Gay Beauharnais,
Unfaithful Beauharnais,
Brave Beauharnais,
Foolish Beauharnais,
Playing his drawing room game of the people.
That leads to the sound
On the sullen ground
Of the death cart's wheel,
And for her prison,
Coldness and ignominy,
And the whisper, the threat not fulfilled
Of stern Madame Guillotine's steel?

And after in Tallien's salon
(The friend of our lady of Thermidor,
The friend of Barras, her lover)
That self-sure and sallow young man,
Small and ugly and bitter,
So sudden to strike and to plan
And to think and to act alone
Who would climb to the peak of a throne,
Half lift her there,
Suspended in air,
And then cast her loose to despair?

Or better, disregarding the prophecy
Of the negress who said,
Wearing a crimson turban about her head:
“One day, mademoiselle shall be queen,”
Does she foresee
Things that had kinder been?
A creole lover
Who came in his barge to Trois-Ilets?
Marriage?
Children?
No heartaches?
No lost crowns to weep?
Small grandchildren
Talking the island patois?
Peace?
Ease?
Dullness?
After, death’s sleep?

What does the little Josephine
Seek
In dream
On the green
Island of Martinique?
What does she look for?
What fancies gleam?
Blown by warm breeze

Over warm seas,
Where the rich oranges,
Ripe and fragrant,
Hang on the trees,
Like to the heavy golden apples
Of the Hesperides?

MALMAISON

(*Napoleon Buonaparte—1809*)

COME, let us walk awhile beneath the trees,
And watch a great white moon ride up the sky,
And forget that the night as well as the day must die,
And that tomorrow will know
The end of many things we have loved so.
Time takes them, and they go.

Faugh! These state policies!
And that young fair-haired Hapsburg Marie-Louise!
No doubt she is as good as any one,
And she will serve for spiting of the Czar.
And I must have a son
To consummate my obvious destinies.
What slaves we emperors are!
France clamors this, and I
Dare not call false the logic of her cry,
Though it be swords to slash and sleets to freeze,
For she has bought me my crown with her poured
 blood,
And her fine sons given up as battle food,
And thereby has won over me command,
The waving of whose hand
Brings half of Europe's monarchs to their knees.

Ah well,
There is a coinage that we owe to Hell
(Or Heaven some men call it!)
For magnifying thus our potencies!

But suppose chance had willed it otherwise;
Suppose that I had even now remained
The morose young Corsican ensign who unchained
Hounds of artillery at the St. Roche church,
When rabble-ridden France was in the lurch;
Then disappeared from sight beyond all search?
Or suppose that bitter cadet at Brienne,
Tortured by the old snobbery and disdain,
Had struck the face of one of them, and then
Drawn back and stopped a slug-shot in his brain?
The old star-strewn skies,
Would they not remain?
And France gradually grown wise,
Shaking off the mob with its snarls and its lies,
In the end suffer less pain?

But no, that could not be.
An insolent and terrible unrest
Had its course to burn and to run
Before the poison was done,
As you know best.
And before that, Fate had in store for me

Glory and agony—
You, Josephine!
And after you, with your light cruelty
And my young madness, inevitably Italy.
There was no mean.

Then shot by shot the tale was as if told.
The shattering bursts of cannon fire that rolled
Austria back at Marengo and gave the kings
A sight of one they could not understand,
Forewrote upon the clouds his empery,
Predestined certainly
Austerlitz and the ruin at Friedland,
And Jena that showed many marvelous things
Was sure before he fled to Egypt's sand.

And there are more things to come.
And not the least of these,
That he who loved his home,
And the hearth he has rarely known
As few men have done,
And who has forgiven infidelities,
Remembering the weak flesh and his own,
And who has gained a companion instead of a lover,
Must give all over
For the uncertain fate

Of a vision that may not last his days,
To his dream of a supreme State,
And a bewildered people's praise.

Ma chere amie,

Tomorrow and thereafter we shall only be parted
friends.

Tonight all else ends

But the tumult ahead of me.

Well, here on the fateful threshold,

I swear I would not alter one jot of it all.

I would not recall

One bitterness. For whatever dark may befall,

It has been written my life has seen one spark

In the unlighted void of the years,

One comet across the cold,

Whether, still

Warring against the jealousy of His will,

I shape to something enduring, reach to my vast

Web of the nations, rise to my dream at last,

Or whether, bitter with disillusion and tears,

In the clash of the monarchies,

I go down to the dark

Of unattained destinies.

Meanwhile, it is a lie, my queen, that I do not love you
still,

Or that this is my will.

And it is not yet dawn. We have two hours or three
Before from Austria comes my destiny.

Give me your arm. Walk awhile with me.

PORTRAIT OF THE GOD

Love is not an *enfant terrible*, sophisticated at ten, and gay:

At home in the banter of fops and ladies whose repartee is politely risqué;

He is not a puffy-cheeked marble cupid from a *fête galante* by Watteau;

He was born of his mother's jade-green seafoam all of the years ago.

He has no savor of well-bred weddings with handsome ushers in cutaway coats,

And stout dowagers in the family pews with diamonds at their throats.

He has no tinkle of refined gossip, smooth as jammed scones at afternoon teas;

The west wind has lent him her cool, gray swiftness, the sunlight its warming ecstasies.

Fine as spun gold of the leaping waves that lift shoreward and topple and break;

Free as the sure-winged poising seamews with their course in the light to take;

He has the truth of the salty wind that stings the dunes in easterly weather;

He has the splendor of two bare souls touching the stars together.

SONG WRITTEN FOR C. P. C.

WHEN star rushes past star
In the deep, black gulf of space,
They say that huge tides race—
Tides made of lambent flame—
Upward and out from the face
Of each star toward the other star.
Thus universes are born,
Moon, and planet, and sun,
Sunset and pearly morn,
Midnight and noon—each one
From the tide when star rushes past star.
Oh my beloved, was not like this the birth
Of our love which is like a gem of most precious
worth?

When sun rushes past sun
(Each sun a white hot sphere)
In the cold abyss of the void,
They say that huge tides run,
Surges of fire deployed
Into leaping cascade
From one sun to the other sun.
Thus universes are made,
Nebulas, Milky Ways
That foam in great trails of light;

And the long-haired comets that blaze—
From the tide when sun rushes past sun.
Oh my dear one, was it not in this way
That our love was shaped that gleams with translucent
ray?

I have loved you.
(Must I say more than this?)
I do love you.
(Need I have other words?)
I will love you always.
When I first saw you.
Now.
And forever.
With my heart.
With my soul.
With my body.

(Oh, body clinging to body that reminds us of star
birth,
Of planets shaped out of flames leaping up incan-
descent,
Of suns being formed,
Moons moulded and hardened!
. . . And the sweep of the sea,
And the sound of trees talking together,
And the song of birds!)

II. TIME AND PLACE

FOR A GARDEN NEAR FLORENCE

HERE are bending daisies white,
Gracious tall campanula bells,
Blue forget-me-nots and bright
Iris fair as asphodels,
Lavender, pale columbines,
And roses climbing up like vines.

Here morning brings soft haze to soothe,
And fragrance when the dew is wet;
Here are paths of pebbles smooth
With trellised arches over-set,
Whereunder like a fairy glade
Is leopard-mottled sun and shade.

And there's an ancient stone gray pool
Where the water-lily glows,
And a fountain shivers, cool.
And close at hand a river flows.
And there is drowsiness and ease,
Like the quiet sound of bees.

O Time, whose halting steps can crawl,
Or can be light and swift and gay,
With the ringed snails on the wall,
Linger here a while today,
Not like a lizard silver-green,
Flash and then no more be seen!

FOR A TUSCAN SUMMER

No frowning countenance, tall Ceres, wear,
O grain-bringer, who in these late June days
When the whole valley is pale-blue with haze
For the ensuing winter do prepare,
But with a crimson poppy in your hair,
Standing among the silver olive-trees,
Strew the fine largess of a cooling breeze
On all your servitors who labor there.
Yours is the power to fling down fierce heat
Like lances on the brown-skinned men who toil
Among the trailing vines and curving wheat,
But it is also in your power to bless
With days as fine and vigorous as oil,
Making an end of noon's hot hatefulness.

BIRD FABLE

FIRST a long dark. Then one day suddenly
All that I knew split wide into a flood
Of golden glory that I learned was light,
And there I lay upon an easy bed
Of interwoven twigs and leaves and straw,
To which a swift and darting flash of blue
Came back from time to time to cram my craw
With squirming slugs and wriggling fat worms
Endlessly, though I always cried for more.
This was my universe, and so time passed.
Sometimes it rained, and the blue flash lay still,
Covering me from downward slatting arrows
That ruffed her sea-bright coverts. Sometimes it
 shone,
And then I lay and basked. Always I grew.
At last one morning I heard a sharp new note,
Staccatoed in her voice. "Cuk, cuk!" it said,
"Cuk-cuk; cuk, cuk!" She always had a croon
Until that time, and so I started up,
Arched my young plumes and straightway found my-
 self
Peering across a wide and swaying world
So tall it made me dizzy. "Cuk, cuk, cuk!"
I tried to follow, and a limb swung up
And caught me, and the nest was far behind.

So there I stood, afraid and teetering,
Poised in a windy place of swishing leaves
And tree-top branches moving crazily.
I was giddy with fear, and yet could not go back,
And still I heard her sharp voice call: "Cuk, cuk!"
And so at last I leapt. Earth hurtled up,
Swift as a falling star. A picket fence
Swung close and thrust its white and painted spears
Right at my heart. A thorn bush seemed to point
Sharp daggers at my breast. Then all at once—
I don't know how or why—miraculously
My wings began to beat. That was the way
I soared for the first time into the sky.

SPRING IN CONNECTICUT

INTENSELY Spring on the Connecticut River, without
any blare of bugles or roll of drums,

Comes.

It comes rather as a slow procession of lighter and
fragile greens

Among the dark green of the hemlocks,

Covering with a tenuous veil the flinty, hard granite,
Making delicate the blue hills.

It comes as the sudden effulgence of blossoming shad-
bush,

As the beat and the cry

Of ducks like a print on the sky.

Winter is six months long

Until even the terse Connecticut speech is frozen

Into lips that are frozen and blue.

And then one day it is over.

Forsythia blooms in Saybrook;

Magnolia burgeons in Essex;

And back from the marshes now tender with life
immortal,

The frail resurrection that mocks us,

Is the gold of marsh marigold,

The spendthrift gold of the cowslips;

And the shad sweep in from the ocean,

Urgent,

Relentless,
Emphatic,
Like the sea themselves,
Like a swelling flood tide of pure silver,
Like life immortal,
The frail resurrection that mocks us,
Like the sweep of renewing song.

WILD DUCK SONG

ONCE upon a time—once in Georgia—
I saw a great horde
Of wild duck flying
Like the lightning of the Lord;

I saw wild duck flying,
I heard their wings beat
With a noise like the pistons
Of an engine running sweet,

With a sound like brooding thunder,
With a swift, sure thrum,
With a throb like singing pulse beats,
Or a strong, rolled drum.

I saw them flying
Without swerve to left or right.
Their necks were stretched straight
And their bellies flashed white;

A hundred, a thousand,
In a great dark swarm
Till the sky was streaked and smoky
As before a storm.

I remember the place:
A wide, shallow lake
Gleamed in the sunlight
Like the cast skin of a snake.

There were lily pads as brown
As an old felt hat,
And tangled sedgy grasses.
The shores were low and flat.

More and more they came,
And their wings beat a tune
As wild as any saga,
As weird as any rune,

Scrawling ancient magic,
And then they had swept on.
The empty sky gulped them.
They were utterly gone.

And there followed such a stillness
You could hear your heart stop,
Or a dry grass blade bend,
Or a single leaf drop.

"HILLS RUDDY WITH SUMACH"

OF New England,
Men who have never been there,
Say that it is hard, cold, and iron;
Cold as the pilgrim forefathers,
Hard as their courage,
Iron as the discipline of their hearts.

Of Massachusetts,
Men who have never seen it,
Say that it is dour, stern and rigid;
Dour as the conscience of a Puritan,
Rigid as the mind of a Puritan,
Stern as his uncompromising will.

They have never, then, gone from Plymouth to
Scituate in the fragile and tender springtime
When the first stars of the wildflowers
(Mayflowers—the ship's name was *Mayflower*—
Violets, anemones)
Are scattered in the young grass.

They can never have tramped, then, blowing Cape
Cod dunes in late August,
When the wind, always with a tang of salt, ruffles the
white daisies,

When the wind, always from the sea, ruffles the Queen
Anne's lace and the yarrow,
Stirs like waves the wild indigo, the yellow sweet
clover,
Ripples through steeplebush, mustard, ragged robin,
Blowing always from the sea.

They can never have breathed deeply the sharp,
harshly fine air of Duxbury salt marshes in the
autumn
(Behind, hills are yellow with goldenrod, purple with
asters,
Behind, hills are ruddy with sumach, red with choke-
cherry,
And the grim Rock out of sight around the corner)
When the herring gulls dip and plunge, shrieking
discordantly as cymbals,
When the great herons rise slowly and leisurely out of
the bending grasses,
And the brant pause, turning south.

THE AWAKENING OF THE YEAR

FIRST from the southward a soft breeze came and
tattled

Tales of warm lush lands to the stripped boughs of the
trees;

Then all the brooks broke free from their ice and
brattled

Down through the glens with awakening melodies;
And the brown chill earth was stirred by the touch of
the rain

To its melodious old carol "Spring, spring is here
again!"

Crocuses sprang up, blue, yellow, magenta, all over
the grass.

Forsythia flowered and willows grew fluffy green.

Up in the soft cloudy sky the first swallow was seen,
And the beat of his wings told the tale how hard days
must pass.

Then the winter-rusty ploughs were brought out from
the barn,

And the ploughman's voice was a song to assault the
air,

As he drove his furrows across a field where a tarn
Gleamed silverly, snow-freed, like steel that is bare.
Children ran in the sun. From the steaming byre,
The cattle were driven forth to graze on the hill.

Old men's hearts were stirred with intangible desire
Of something dear and illusive that lured them still.
And lovers that had grown cold kissed, saying: "Let
us love again!"
Forgotten in one brief hour was the winter's chill and
d disdain!

MARCH

"Comes in like a lion: goes out like a lamb"

MADCAP March, the rebel of months, the buccaneer,
Scarved with a streaming banner of torn and magnificent cloud,
Shouted his herding challenge to the frightened months of the year,
Cried a stormy defiance, terribly proud:

"Ho, you cringing ones, have you prancing blood in
your veins
To swashbuckle a bit with a free and a fearless
outlaw?"
Here he pelted their faces with the coldest of freezing
rains.
"Dare you battle with me till the steel bites raw?"

So most insolently, with swelling rhodomontade,
This swaggering windy braggart strutted the town,
And he backed the puff of his words with the rhetoric
of his blade,
And he laughed at the timid seasons and guyed them
down.

But then he met with April, that dreamy and lovely
girl
With the grace of willows about her, and her voice the
singing of birds,
And his heart became made soft, and his tauntings he
ceased to skirl,
And he put on unthought of tenderness and gentle
words.

JULY

EVEN despite the heat,
This summer day is sweet.
Through tall and waving grass,
The booming bees pass,
Each one seeking with thunder
A flower to plunder—
Not yellow daffodil,
Clear as a bird's trill,
But poppy or wild rose:
July scatters those.
White clouds, massed and high,
Are poised in the sky.
Beyond trees, shadow-blue
A glimpse of sea shows through,
While near at hand cows,
Swishing tails, drowse.
The valley is soft with haze.
Under the scorching blaze,
The fields lie in the sun,
Asleep every one.

FOR THE FIRST DAY OF AUTUMN

THIS is the day I have looked for. This is the day
When the untamed spirit of the ruining world
Has decked herself in colors gleaming and gay,
Has put on the array
Of a false festival that is more proud
Now that she faces death
Than frail spring pageantry and summer cloud.

This is the expected day. The congealing breath
Of winter waits to seal her in her grave.
All sails are furled.
All ships rest near the shore.
No warm seas lave.
Yet she is brave
In a resplendent finery
That outwits feeble imagery
And makes it limp when it would wish to soar.

This is the longed-for day.
These foam-white asters, those asters faintly blue,
And the dull straw of withered goldenrod,
Which mark where summer trod,
Passaging like a king, walking as kings do,
Are now the plumes that an old beauty wears
When the sharp dagger cuts into her mind,
And the years drop away.

III. SHIPS

FOR A CLIPPER-SHIP SEAPORT

(*New England—1840-1850*)

I: PORTRAIT OF A SEA CAPTAIN

UP the high hill above the square, white spire
That lifts above a hard, austere God's home
Where daisies flourish thickly from the loam
And yellow buttercups run like wildfire,
Stands a plain clapboard house as sturdily
As any ship that I have ever known,
Though shaken by March gales, and there, alone,
Lives dark-browed Captain Salton, retired from sea.
Only upon the Sabbath he descends
To listen through the sermon's long two hours
And as he hears the preacher's scathing twang,
He does not think of sin's inglorious ends,
But how the native girls, festooned with flowers,
Made tempting the soft night at Samarang.

II: A LOST VESSEL

ONE day the *Mary Elwell* left this port,
And that was all they ever heard of her.
Not even rumor, evil's harbinger,
Brought back with other ships a dire report
Of how a sea gale took her for consort,
Or how an empty lifeboat washed ashore.

With royals set she sailed. Nor any more
Was any news of her of any sort.
One other day there came into the town
A crazed sea wanderer who wore gold rings
And babbled of far lands as such men do
And lied for drinks of rum. And no one knew
He was the lost ship's mate, returned to his own,
As no one knows so very many things.

III: LEGEND

LIKE the old yarn of Vanderdecken's ship,
Sailing, a phantom always, down the seas,
This story has its hint of mysteries
And ghostly things and devil's workmanship.
A lank, unprosperous farmer, Southward Gray,
Strode beachward once and then was seen no more,
But whether he was drowned along that shore
Or under alien stars no man can say.
Some have him roaming yet, and every land,
As young and restless now as he was then,
A symbol of that race of restless men,
Although he should long since be dust and mold.
But that is what has never yet been told,
And there is always the unanswering sand.

IV: AN OLD STORY

BECAUSE he found small measure of romance
In summing clerkly columns day by day,
He sniffed the sou'west breeze and learned a way
To lead in sequent moons a sprightlier dance,
And so with those times' marvelous nonchalance,
He bid the granite shores a swift farewell
To have a seaman's berth on the gray swell,
A topsail reefing time, and Cape Horn's chance.
His reward was an eloquent epitaph
Over a grave wherein no body was:
"Abdiel Johnson, 20, lost at sea,"
Commemorating a day when with no laugh,
And with sick thought of how all comrades pass,
The forecastle kept its watches gloomily.

V: THE LAUNCHING OF A SHIP

THE stalwart sound of mauls all winter long
Rang sturdily in chorus till one day,
The scaffolding and frames were stripped away,
And there she stood as graceful as a song,
Yet with her bluff square bows less graceful than
strong,
Fanned by the restless breezes of late May,
Above the hush of an anticipant throng
Poised till she plunge into the rustling bay.

With her slow pride of queenly dignity
At last she started down the sloping ways,
And as she moved there came a shout of praise
That had two thousand voices' unity
From men who having no other poetry
Made her as clear a hymn as men need raise.

VI: SAILOR'S WIFE

As often as the dull and drenching gray
Of the thick, offshore fog, that deep sea beast,
Let you look past the sand spit and the bay
To the last buoy slanting in the east,
She sat and let her patient, sad eyes feast
On what to some was merely wind and wave
As empty and as hopeless as a grave,
Yet to her carried hope that should have ceased.
Ten years ago his ship went pluming out,
Yet even now she would not be denied
The courage to deny a heartsick doubt
That one day the west wind would bring it back,
And lay him at her feet like the brown wrack
Cast up upon the beach by the high tide.

VII: PORTRAIT OF A BEACHCOMBER

DOWN to the place where steady trade winds blow.
By Martinique, St. Lucia, and St. Croix,
When he was little older than a boy,

He ran away from school and home to go.
He left New England with its drifted snow,
Its cold commandments, and its lack of joy,
And there he has been ever since, although
Conscience has always gnawed with her annoy.
Sometimes he thinks: "Next year, I will go home."
Sometimes he longs for cool Connecticut breeze,
But then he pours a slow glass of brown rum,
Stirs it, and sees the pink surf break to foam,
And hears the scratching rustle of palm trees,
And then there is another year to come.

VIII: A SURVIVAL

WHERE now steam tugs and ferries squeal a rude
Disturbance of a venerability
That has a right to more tranquillity
Than earth these days can offer from its mad mood,
He sits and seems to find a time to brood,
Like to a prophet in his majesty,
On the eternal vigor and manhood
And the eternal wonder of the sea;
And in contempt of a less valiant age,
He seems to smile as our steel ships go down
Seaward—with a slow scorn. And it is well.
For of the sea whose tolerance made the town,
Learned in deep calm or in the gale's white rage
Is much no man alive but he can tell.

PEN DRAWING OF A MERCHANT
SEAMAN

WHEREVER there are towns of men, or bales of freight
along the shores,
His feet have gone. He knows this earth from Taku
Bay to Helsingfors.

Wherever there are heavy crates of merchandise on
loaded quays,
Some slugging tramp has carried him, ploughing the
multicolored seas.

His ships have sailed the chill Black Sea along the path
that Jason went,
And he has stood in Buenos Aires, pride of the south-
ern continent.
He has seen Dakar, Singapore, East London, and the
Spanish Main.
He knows the way the monsoon hits Colombo in a
wall of rain.

Rich Russian wheat has filled his hold, sweet Smyrna
figs; Rosario hides.
Against the wharves for Chile ore his ship has bumped
her storm-scarred sides.

He has trekked oil from Vera Cruz, cork out of Lisbon,
Cape Town gold,
And yet he is a small, slight man, a little queer, a little
old,

Without one pride of lifted brow, without one glim-
mer of the eye
To mark the pageant he has seen of places far, and
mystery;
Without one trace in speech or walk of all his journeys
to far lands
That have set wrinkles on his face and calluses upon
his hands.

ALONG THE DOCKS

BLACK hulks of ships loom large against the sky,
Skeleton masts reach stark toward the moon.
There is a wind. Proud clouds are marching by.
The rigging whines a slow and dreary tune.
Below, along the darkness of the piers
Shoot golden splinters where a ripple breaks,
Writhing, then twisting, till the stream appears
Alive with thrashing phosphorescent snakes.
The hawsers creak and saw uncertainly,
Losing their slackness with the falling tide.
The night grows very lonely. There must be
Only the damp sea wind, nothing besides.
Then suddenly a grim rat pads along.
The night grows dense. The sea wind ends its song.

And now across the moon large heavy clouds
Blot out the golden glimmer of her light.
Deathly and still they muffle her in shrouds.
The atmosphere grows very tense. The night
Seems to have found some menace for the world,
Marshaling her battalions overhead
Into great somber masses, which when hurled
Will blast a way with lightning hot and red.
There are no stars. They one by one succumbed
To the storm's stealthy, terrible advance.

There is no sky. Only the dark unplumbed
From which the unleashed thunderbolts will glance.
There is no sound. Then suddenly the rain—
Musical, drenching. Then it stops again.

And in the second stillness you can hear
The yielding of the boards to some one's feet.
Some one is moving, drawing near, more near,
Advancing with the grumbling storm's retreat.
A slippery plank slides downward from its pile
And startles him. He stops. No sound at all.
He seems to halt there for a little while,
Thinking to detect a watcher from its fall.
But then again his cautious step begins
Along the dock. You hear his scuffling pace.
And you half see him where the obscurity thins
Just where full darkness finds a brighter place.
And then the moon clears. And the shadows run.
And he steps forth, the solitary one.

His face is wracked and ruined with much pain,
And there is not a known infirmity
That has not smirched his features with the stain
Of dissolute outlawed iniquity.
His cheeks are scarred. His limbs are rotten through.
Disease has slain the luster of his eye.

And so he has but one thing left to do,
To crawl here like a rat, and rat-like die,
Plunging himself to oblivion in the river
That took him to destruction long ago,
Using this lone last black way to deliver
The sea from him, and him from too much woe.
Ah, had you seen the way those waves he eyed,
Shaken with fear, nor strengthened with a pride!

Here he had stood—it was ten years ago.
Here now he stands, watching the oily stream
Eddying seaward. There had been a glow
Upon his face, and he had dared to dream.
But now—well, he has almost quite forgotten
The magic of his first glimpse of the sea,
The ecstasy and ardor he'd begotten
Seeing the tall ships moored beside the quay;
Seeing the masts, hearing the chantymen,
Hearing the chunking of some freighter's screw
When the tugs puffed and she moved out again
To roam awhile where seas and skies were blue;
Seeing the lean four-funneled liners move
Outward like greyhounds with a speed to prove.

So he had squandered many sunny days,
Learning the jargon of a hundred lands.

And men had told him of the sun's good blaze
Upon far ports. And men with horny hands
Had yarned of their surpassing idleness
Lazying down the coral Caribbees,
Or picking up the pilot at Dungeness
When Britain showed dark gray across gray seas.
Or other times when sparkling white and red
Gleamed Rio, and they anchored near the town,
With Southern constellations overhead,
And they had money and time to drink it down.
"Aye! the Sea's one good mistress!" they had cried;
"And she will keep you well until you've died!"

And then they told of riotous brave nights
Along the Valparaiso harbor front;
Of burning wines, and all the seductive lights,
And things that men will do, and things they won't.
They shouted of the ways of Southern women
When their hot Spanish blood coursed wantonly;
They told of murders done by hands inhuman
Down alleyways where God forgot to be.
And all the while he seemed to hear the wind
Shouting among the masts and down the bay,
While all his inborn romance struck him blind
And he must wander, why he could not say:
Only his mad, mad heart kept urging on.
He found a ship and signed. The sea had won.

The sea had won. And this had been her gift:
Disease, and harlotry, and drunkenness,
Long nights of loathing when he scarce made shift
To live until the dawn's inert caress,
Hours of hell in stifling boiler-rooms,
Seasickness, fainting, choking in the steam,
Gasping in all Inferno's blackest glooms
Stabbed only by the red-hot furnace gleam.
And then a few lust-maddened days ashore
Where the wolf-women lurked like beasts of prey
Until the very city's thunderous roar
Seemed to be snarling-pitiful as they.
After, more days at sea, black, hateful, grim,
When all the sea's resentment hounded him.

There had been one day—blacker than the others.
An Irish fog had met them off the coast
(One of those deathly fogs that blinds and smothers)
Just where the Scillies are, and ships are lost.
And they had served the fog and rammed a ship,
Wounding her helpless bulwarks heartlessly,
And seen the lifeless waters mouth and lip,
And the proud thing devoured by the sea;
And seen the insatiate waters close again,
And watched the gurgling bubbles rise and break
Until the ocean smoothed into a plain,
And then steamed on the course they had to make.

He was off watch. All he remembered now
Was moving up the Thames with crumpled bow.

There had been one night—under more ardent stars,
When he had almost thought the sea was heaven.
Across a moon the yardarms stretched their bars.
The wind was soft. The vessel's keel was even.
There was no sound, only the ripple of seas
The gliding clipper hardly splashed aside,
And in the shrouds the strumming of the breeze.
Above, sails mounted tier on tier in pride.
All night he lay there, while the moon he watched,
Trailing a wake, move westward in the sky,
Until he knew that this could not be matched
And he would lie here gladly till he die,
Resting forever in the memory
Of present glory that had come to be.

But after that a dawn broke gray and mean.
A smoky wind smote hard. They had to reef.
The hissing waves spat spindrift. There had been
A sudden change of mood beyond belief.
Cursing and snarling they had fought along
The fragile yards in perilous high places,
Battling above there where the wind was strong
To beat the shrieking canvas in their faces.

And one had fallen and crushed himself, but lived
To beg along the docks for many years.
And one had fallen and died, but no one grieved,
Knowing the sea's high mockery for tears.
And then a mast had crashed, and five were drowned.
So the storm passed triumphant, victory crowned.

This was the sea: a sort of fiendish god
Exacting unrequited servitude,
Who kept men treading long the paths they trod
For her vain hope of unsubstantial good;
Cruel, malevolent, bitter as her brine,
Blinding as fog, and hateful as the floe,
Loathing the ships and shipmen, able to divine
Their passage and to wreck them ere they know.
Yet even now as he stands shuddering,
Part of her spoil, nor daring to end it all,
He seems to be surrounded by a ring
Of sparkling sea on which the sunbeams fall—
Kindly, bright, lucent—where he has not yet gone—
Calling him on, forever calling him on!

AT THE NARROWS

FOUR liners lay at anchor off Quarantine under a pew-
ter gray sky.

Their funnels are red and black, tan and black, blue
and white, and plain yellow.

As it is near dusk the faint gold of light comes filtering
through their portholes.

It reflects from the water.

A strong tide runs and the bay is choppy, yet they lie
there as motionless as enchanted castles.

Within, a sleeping giant, is the power of steam and
steel.

BURIAL AT SEA

He always said he wanted to rest at sea,
With the great waves slapping forever above his head;
—Well, Life who was otherwise harsh said that this
 could be,
And now he is dead!

He died at dawn. We were driving before the Trades.
And the cloudlike sails were straining among the spars,
Suffused with that haloish glow which always pervades
When a soul seeks the stars.

We were driving before the Trades. And the hull was
 creaking.
He had not the respite of silence as he went to his
 place.
And yet when Life finished, for him, her clamorous
 speaking
There was peace on his face.

Topsails aback we hove to; and the rollers moved us
To curvet and dip like a general's horse on review;
And the shrieking sea-birds wheeled overhead and
 reproved us
With their harrowing mew.

Then the captain read solemn words. Then he signaled morosely,
And the weighted body slipped like a shot overside.
And after, a ghost of gray gull followed us closely,—
The day that he died!

AT THE EDGE OF THE BAY

WHAT! After your six-month drowsing and indolent
sleeping,
The old blood beats fast again?
And all because of April and the warm weeping
Of her slow rain?

You had been content enough all winter long
To dream of old seafarers valiant in song,
But now you cry for a way through the restless foam-
ing,
The quest of a lifting prow toward misty shores,
And foreign roadsteads at the end of an earth-wide
roaming
To the creak on tholes of your oars.

Now you walk by the shipyards and each tall mast
Moves a longing for the blue of the offshore swell,
And you find your love for the ocean and all of its
vast
Expanse in the disquiet of each ebb-tide smell.

Ever since men launched the *Argo*, this has been so.
Men in this cool-breeze season have known as high
Anguish of dream birth as ever a poet will know,
Considering how this line will let waves slip by,

And how that sheer will give grace, and how spars will
show,
Black against the same moon in an unsame sky.

LONGSHORE

OH, I am tired to death of the drab wharf miles!
I should like to sweep with the drift of the ebb to sea,
Past all this rotting of ships moored to weedy piles.
Rather a cruddled waste where the waves move free!

Beaten gold on a thousand spires of flame,
Voices that clamor and surge from a bitter heart,
All of man's pent up restlessness, all of man's shame;
I am sick of these, I would have gray space for my
part!

There is not a vehemence here that the sea has not
known.

All of this strife is a little thing to the sea's.
What is the longshore love to the sea's love for its
own?

What is its ease to the ocean's passion for ease?

The floe is smudgy with dirt; the ferries squeal;
There are grimy things small men can worship before;
But I have only one God who can bid me to kneel;
I worship a manly God out of sight of the shore!

Perhaps this is but unease? Well, unease has spoken,
Though inarticulately, at all longshore things:
Send me a low gray space by dark land unbroken,
A wild space where wet waves break and a wet wind
stings!

PORTRAIT OF A SEA-DOG

I.

HE sailed with Essex when he flouted Spain,
Singeing the beard of His Catholic Majesty.
He saw the great Armada swept to sea.
And after that he roamed the earth in vain
Search for an equal adventure. Some say plain
That when he saw that this could never be
He flung him against odds outrageously,
And so felt once the Inquisition's pain.

Thus for some years. Until Elizabeth
Went the queen's way and hind's way. Then when
 poor
Shifty and craven James came to the throne,
He left the sea, settling down ashore
To wait for the dear, blessed choke of death,
Knowing that England's heart as well was gone.

II.

Thereafter once or twice you heard his name,
And his inn's gorgeous name—*The Golden Fleece*—
As a brave place where seafarers found ease
And honor in the days of honor's shame.
There was a pot of ale for each who came,
And he could warm his hands the fire before,

If he would only talk of some bright shore
Where courage still, and valiance, was a flame.

In some such wise, bulwarking with the past,
He made his hollow present tolerable,
And always had a laugh for each loud jest,
Until you came to think these days were best
Because he bore so bravely to the last,
Unless—as few—you knew him very well.

III.

Then at fourscore he died, erect as when
He stormed some flaming deck at twenty years.
Even at the end he did not yield to fears,
But to the fight went valiantly again.
White-haired and wrinkle-skinned as he was then,
You would have sworn his heart had not grown old,
Seeing the way death's angel found him bold,
A giant in the time of giant men.

When he was gone the neighboring countryside,
Suddenly found its little world more dim,
And realized the things that death can take.
So, for the while their memory of him
Lasted, they told his tale with a high pride,
And spoke his name with Raleigh and Francis Drake.

ROMANCE

DEEP-CHESTED seamen roll and swagger where
Cutlasses clank. Lean fingers itch for dice.
Gruff salty oaths are mouthed, and once or twice
I find myself breathing a desperate prayer.
Outside there should be wind and wave and air
With a ship's deck yellow beneath the moon,
And overhead black spars. And swinging there
Hanged prisoners dancing a rigadoon.

. . . Old friend of mine who read so desperately,
Under whose pirate ensign did you sail
To have caught this outlaw spirit of the sea?
For when I hear you read that slashing tale,
Twenty unstifled buccaneers in me
Work seaward a lean schooner, crowding the rail.

IV. FOFO, THE CLOWN

*FOFO, THE CLOWN, COMES TO
THE GATE OF HEAVEN*

Down in the circus where all was dark,
Grief stalked on the soft tanbark.

Down in the circus where once was laughter,
Grief clung to an iron rafter.

And the men were solemn, the women crying,
For Fofo, Fofo the clown, was dying.

He had made them laugh till his own heart bled
And now he lay on a crumpled bed.

He had given them mirth he could coin or borrow,
And now his own reward was sorrow.

No mother was by him, no brother near him.
There was not even a priest to hear him.

But as his minutes ran out like sand,
A freak from the side show held his hand,—

Zit, the fat man, till his face was even,
And his soul rushed out to the gates of heaven,

Till his soul rushed out to the pearly gates
Where bearded Saint Peter forever waits,

There he took off his cap and he bowed him down,
And he said: "Let me in. I am Fofo, the clown."

He said: "Let me in. I have done no wrong,
But to laugh laughter and sing song."

He said: "Let me in to heaven's sheen.
I can beat my hymns on a tambourine."

Saint Peter's face was like snow that's driven.
He said: "Have you gone to church and been
shriven?"

Saint Peter's face was as blue as the west.
He said: "Have you gone to church and confessed?"

"Have you drunk the wine? Have you broken the
bread?"
"I have done neither," Fofo said.

"I was too busy for helps and handles,
"What would I know of masses and candles?"

"I was too busy slaying hells.
"Where would I get me priests and bells?"

Saint Peter's face was as blank as a cod.
He said: "I will lay your case before God."

Then he went and stood by the jacinth throne
Where God was a figure of carven stone.

He went and stood by the Lord's footstool.
He said: "Outside there awaits a fool.

"He knows nothing of faith and religion,
"Yet he's come here like a homing pigeon.

"No priest or bishop has given him quittance,
"Yet he knocks at the gate and demands admittance.

"He knocks at the gate. The world is through with
him.

"Tell me, God, what on earth shall I do with him?"

God was weary with too much thinking
Which is worse for the head than too much drinking.

God was tired of creating hourly
Addled worlds that turned out sourly:

Hills and valleys and rolling plain,
Waving forest and rippling grain,

Rushing rivers and bubbling fountains,
Sea-strewn islands and jagged mountains,

But whereon men who were made for beauty
Did ugly things in the name of duty,

Slaying each other, hurting each other,
Father and son, brother and brother.

God was tired and his sick heart ailed
Like an aging poet whose verse has failed,

But he said to Saint Peter: "Nothing can bore me.
"Bring this man you speak of before me!"

So unto God's most terrible frown,
Two junior angels led Fofo, the clown:

Two junior angels, with his hands behind him,
And the awe of the Lord like rope to bind him;

They set him before the jacinth throne,
And suddenly he and God were alone,

And God's face was as drawn and white
As his make-up paint on a circus night,

And God's face was as drawn and long
As his face was when his jokes went wrong,

And he suddenly knew that God was lonely
As a clown can be, and a clown can only,

And he suddenly knew that God was weary:
His fear left him; he became cheery.

God frowned one of his fiercest faces:
"What can you do?" "I can make grimaces."

God said: "Tell me who you are."
"I am Fofo, the clown, who can juggle a star.

"I am Fofo, the clown, whose gay voice chings
"From the moon's mountains to Saturn's rings.

"Clear and clean till it wakens your wits
"And your jaws ache and your side splits."

His words rang sweet as a dulcimer.
He did a back tumble to Jupiter.

In his hand he picked up the moon
And tossed it in air like a bright balloon.

Then he leapt toward a comet's blazing trail
And rode, making faces, on its tail,

And after he'd finished his sudden joke,
He turned to God and to God he spoke:

"Except ye be as a little child."
God cupped his face in his hand and smiled.

Freed from care by the wine of laughter,
God's sides shook and the roar came after.

Cleansed by mirth from all grief for sin,
God said to Saint Peter: "Let him in.

"Give him a harp, give him a crown,
"Find a throne for Fofo, the clown.

"Find him a throne of porphyry,
"For he is the first to conquer me.

"I thought I was wise, and deeply wiled,
"And Fofo showed me I'd never smiled.

"I thought that I was omnipotent.
"He found me bored and indifferent.

"Let joy rise like bread that's leaven,
"The trump of the angels be ringing, ringing,
"As Fofo, the clown, enters heaven,
"The seraphs be shouting, the cherubs singing.

"And clad in a robe as soft as down,
"Fine of weave, of texture even,
"Let Fofo forever make fun of my frown,
"Lord of the Lord of heaven."

V. FOREIGN TONGUES

RONDEAU

(From the French of Charles d'Orléans)

THE sky hath laid aside her cloak
Of wind and chill and stinging rain,
And now in cramoisie again
She vests, of sun and clouds like smoke.
And that hath neither sung nor spoke,
Of bird or beast doth none remain!
The sky hath laid aside her cloak
Of wind and chill and stinging rain!
Rivers and streamlets have awoke
From beastly winter's grip of pain
To flash like golden net made plain.
Spring her new powers doth invoke.
The sky hath laid aside her cloak
Of wind and chill and stinging rain!

PORTRAIT OF THE WRITER

(From the Italian of Cecco Angiolari)

IF I were fire, I would burn up the world;
If I were wind, with storms I would it sweep;
If I were water, I would drown it deep;
If I were God, to hell it would be hurled;
If I were Pope of Christians good and true,
I would rejoice because I fooled them shiftily;
If I were king, do you know what I would do?
I'd order all beheaded very swiftly.
If I were dead, I'd flee before my sire;
If I were living, I'd run from him in shame,
And from my mother I would do the same;
If I were Cecco, as I was and am,
I'd love all pretty girls as fair as fire,
And for the ugly ones give not a damn.

TO A FRIEND

(From the Italian of Francis Petrarch)

SLOTH, gluttony, and lazy lassitude
Have from the world stolen all virtue away;
Hence from its rightful course has gone astray
Our nature, bound in chains by habitude;
And so far spent is every kindly ray
Of heaven that gives us its beatitude
That he is held with madness nigh endued,
Who by the Muses' fountain longs to stray.

Who wishes laurel? Who myrtle on his brow?
"In rags and naked, go, philosophy!"
Says the vile crowd, intent on thoughts of gain.
Few comrades will you have to cheer you now.
Therefore, I pray you the more fervently,
Lay not aside your noble task as vain.

PORTRAIT OF A LOVER

(From the Italian of Gaspara Stampa)

LADIES, if you would know my sovereign lord,
Think of a man of sweet and kind aspect,
Youthful in years but old in intellect,
Of honor and of worth the perfect word;
Fair in his hair, as gleaming as a sword,
In person tall, in walk and mien erect,
And finally, who has not one defect,
Save that with love, alas, he is not stored.
But if you would know me, consider then
A woman who both is and seems to be
An image of the pale and martyred dead;
One who although an inn of constancy
Cannot make him she loves above all men
Turn for her many tears his cruel head.

QUATRAIN

(From the Italian of Michelangelo Buonarotti)

Oh, I am glad I sleep, and am of stone,
While arrogance and evil unvexed go;
Neither to see nor hear, I fortune own;
Therefore disturb me not. Speak low, speak low!

VI. SATIRE AND ELATION

WE BEING YOUNG . . .

LORD, let us sound our trumpets now
That we are young, that we are young;
And turn our long-boat's flashing prow
Toward seas unkenned and fame unsung;

And bend upon our gleaming spars
The power of great silken sails;
—We must beat out against the stars,
We must adventure till life fails!—

And find, beyond the gold and blue
Of sunset on the troubling sea,
Something undreamed of, something new,
Some tall proud land, some iron lee,

Some soily valley, dark and old,
Where men can sow for winnowing,
Or, rich with carven jade and gold,
The dwelling of a moldered king.

For one dark day, for one black hour,
The bindweed will entwine the stone
That skullface, jealous of our power,
Has given us to keep alone.

Then wine will be a bitter drink,
And love a thing we know no more,
And light a faint shaft through the chink
Of a forever bolted door,

And song a thin remembering
That drones like madness in our ears,
—How should we have the mood to sing,
Having no passions, having no fears?—

And bright adventure and high zest,
Like calming gales that no more blow,
Forgotten in this rotting rest
Where no dreams stir and no tides flow.

THE SWORDSMAN

HOLDING it just as sure that death must be
The end of all, as anything in time,
He did not seek a reason or a rhyme
For what he was, nor a philosophy
To bolster up his days more comfortably,
To varnish scratchy places, and make plain
What never explanation could explain:
Why born things meet a doom inevitably,
And why the common end of men and roses
In whom so much of beauty and of grace
Finds for a little while abiding place
Is only this—and nothing more nor less—
That when their measured span of living closes,
They must go down to dusk and nothingness.

Instead, he took his life for what it was,
And only let his conscience so encroach
As saved him the unease of self-reproach,
And let the days swiftly or slowly pass
Without a single “Heigho” or “Alas”
For all their fleeting fervors, though he knew
That when his last had left him, he—he too—
Must wither as the autumn-withered grass;
And found in the unending flight of days,
In Aprils and Octobers that went by,

A wonder and a splendor he could praise,
Not, as some found, eternal mockery,
But life and the fine dreams that it can raise,
The single solace of man who is to die.

Much as a swordsman, though he surely know
The certain and dark fate against him stored
And the old awful wisdom of the Lord
That he who takes the sword must perish so;
Yet in the swift exchange of blow for blow
Forgets that one shall shortly be his end,
When he shall get a hurt no skill can mend,
And learn the bitterness of overthrow,
And in the clash of blades sees only this,
Another moment won, and beaten back
Another moment's adversary in shame.
So, as his life hangs chancewise, hit or miss,
He joys to see his blade cleave down its track,
And through his muscles feels exultant flame.

THE GRASSHOPPER AND THE ANT

(A Revised Version)

THE busy ant all summer long
Worked hard and stored much grain.
The grasshopper stored nothing but song.
(Thus far the moral's plain!)

So when the winter came, the ant
(Ants certainly love to!)
Said: "Ha, you wasteful dilettante,
You'll starve—I hope you do!"

But here's where the ant met a mighty rout.
(As a critic he was a ringer.)
A publisher brought the grasshopper out
As a truly original singer.

And now the ant's æsthetic son
(Oh, strange are life's conditions)
Spends all his father's grain hard won
On the grasshopper's first editions.

THE GRAY WOLF TO THE DOGS

O HAPPY fools, who are content to beat
Year after year the selfsame way around;
Who, so your meals be fat, your sleep be sound,
Find life a lease of heaven and very sweet;
Dull dogs of sloth content, not indiscreet
Enough to taste one blooded valiancy;
House-broken, schooled to dull monotony
Whereof will death be found the only mete;
Lift up your heads, bark thanks that you are not
Swift padders of the stark wold, rank on rank,
Scurf-furred and toughish, scrawny as a rune;
Free? Aye, to mate your own kind, lean of flank,
To miss your quarry when the chase is hot,
And bay your tearing hunger to the moon.

PRIMORDIAL

ALTHOUGH we are grown up and very proud,
Wearing our arrogances like a crown,
And shut our hearts up in some stuffy town
Protected from the rain and wind and cloud,
Yet have we never lifted ourselves far
From the blind beast that lurks in each of us,
Red eyed and very lustful, ravenous,
To tear us sorely, civil as we are.

Look! Hunger stirs a wolf in that lean face,
And the sleek tiger shows with each desire
Padding lasciviously down jungle paths.
But most of all fear tames our lion wraths
To jackal skulking, banned from every place,
Snuffling and whining, and afraid of fire.

TRUTH

SEEK as you will, and she eludes you yet.
Delve deep and analyze. You will not find.
There is a limit to the curious mind.
There is a goal to which it cannot get.
There is an end which will not ever be met.
There is a sight to which all vision is blind.
There is a place to which no pathways wind,
The immortal place wherein her rule is set.
Not though with keenest eye you penetrate
The secrets of the atoms, and unfold
The changes which make iron or lead or gold,
Or the warm palpitation of the human heart.
There is no science to win her, or no art.
She is aloof. She is inviolate.

THE ROMANCER

FROM common things and blatant light of day,
And trough-like wallows where the swine-folk swill,
Suddenly and impatient he turns away
To silver horns that blare beyond the hill,
And with an exaltation they know not
Sees in the clouds, as light upon them shone,
The distant shining roofs of Camelot,
The far sea-hidden isle of Avalon.

Say he evades life's issue: must all be
The chroniclers of dust-encumbered things?
He dares to drink full draught of poetry,
And scorns drab sober prose; no Puritan,
Relishes dreams, the finest gold for man;
Nor fears the ache of dull awakenings.



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